



# Emergency Management **UPDATE**

June 2002

## Hurley flood response hits high water mark

By Suzanne Simmons, VDEM Staff Writer

**D**avid Thompson got the first call about trouble in Hurley around 2 p.m. on May 2. The Buchanan County emergency manager immediately drove to Knox Creek to see for himself.

"The banks were full, but there wasn't any flooding," Thompson says, describing his first trip to the town.

"When another wave of rain came through at about 3:30 p.m., Ray Blankenship, Knox District supervisor, called the office and said the town of Hurley was under water."

He quickly tried to reach the town but was stopped by high water a few miles upstream.

"I stood with a crowd of people at the mouth of Coon Branch where the road was blocked," Thompson recalls. "With high water that far down the watershed, I knew the people down below were dealing with an unimaginable situation."

It was 7 p.m. and getting dark before Thompson could make his way downstream towards Hurley. When Thompson finally moved past the high water at Coon Branch, the Virginia State Police, numerous rescue squads and local residents joined him.

Virginia State Police Sgt. M.F. McMurray had also received a call about the Knox Creek flooding at his Vansant headquarters.

"The closer I got, the worse it became. I've never seen anything like it in my 20 years in law enforcement," said McMurray.

"We had no way to get to Hurley. We tried all of the roads in, brought in a Humvee and tried to get a helicopter to them. It was so bad we couldn't fly into the area."

Jack Tolbert, VDEM hazardous materials officer, was also trying to reach Hurley the night of May 2. On his way, Tolbert began dealing with leaking propane tanks as



**Water damage.** Floodwaters wreaked havoc in Hurley, destroying homes and businesses. (VDEM Photos by Suzanne Simmons.)

the water receded upstream. Several rescue teams, including a Kingsport, Tenn., swiftwater rescue team, joined him as he made his way into Hurley.

In 1977, the benchmark flood year for Buchanan County, the water was 1-foot deep in downtown Hurley. In the May 2002 flood, an 8-foot high wall of water and debris roared through downtown, leaving buildings demolished and streets paved with debris-laden mud.

Two lives were lost, more than 100 people were displaced and more than 80 homes were damaged beyond repair.

"This was the worst destruction I've seen, even going back to 1977. We lost mobile homes up here that you can't even find. They are just debris piles," said Tolbert. "The water rose so fast, people just got out of their vehicles and ran. One second they were standing in ankle deep water and suddenly it was up to their waists."

"By the time we got to town, most of the water had receded, but the mud was up to the bottom of the vehicles," says Thompson. "Everyone jumped in and started clearing away the mud – in the dark."

*(continued on page 3)*

# Task forces vital in disaster response

By Bob Lambert, Staff Writer

**T**hough the Tazewell County Disaster Recovery Task Force has been in business for less than a year, they have become the area's resident experts in flood response.

Organized in the aftermath of back-to-back floods in July 2001, the task force went into action again this past March and hasn't stopped yet. With four floods in less than a year, the Tazewell task force has hardly had time to dry out its equipment.

"I hate to say it, but we've been getting plenty of practice," says Sandy Etter, Tazewell County emergency manager.

"Due to the close proximity of last year's floods, we were still in the recovery mode, so to speak. With no pun intended, it flowed right into this year's flood events."

While dealing with its own response and recovery issues, Tazewell was still able to send emergency supplies to Scott and Wise counties in March and more to Buchanan in May.

"We don't recognize boundaries here in Tazewell," Etter says. "We go wherever there's a need."

Donations stockpiled from last year, including bottled water and canned goods, were loaded onto trucks for distribution to storm victims from both flood events.

The county sent trucks to Buchanan County to move supplies collected by the United Way.

"The task force was most valuable in helping people get back on their feet," Etter says. "Their cooperation with Clinch Valley Community Action was indispensable in providing help not only to our county but to the entire region as well."

Russell County also established its task force after the 2001 floods. "This time we were prepared," says Russell County's emergency manager, Judy Cooling.

"We got a head start on our response and recovery even though our task force was still in its infancy."

The task force rollout, assisted by the American Red Cross, promptly got food and clothing out to flood victims and found temporary housing for them. With many of the social services issues ad-



**Box lunches.** Volunteers load food into boxes for delivery or pick up. (VDEM Photo by Suzanne Simmons.)

dressed, Cooling was able to focus on the county's application for public assistance through VDEM and FEMA.

In Virginia, the disaster recovery task force concept is starting to take hold. The success of the task forces in Tazewell and adjacent Russell counties has attracted interest in at least four other counties affected by the spring floods.

While many states have volunteer organizations to assist with disaster response and recovery, Virginia has been a leader in establishing these community-based Disaster Recovery Task Forces.

"Virginia is promoting ways communities can plan for unmet needs in a disaster," says Michelle Stacy, FEMA's voluntary agency liaison at the Disaster Field Office in Wise.

"By broadening the volunteer recovery effort to include businesses, emergency management coordinators and local community service groups, they are community-specific to whatever is happening."

To learn more, contact Sandy Etter at [tazco03@naxs.net](mailto:tazco03@naxs.net) or Judy Cooling at [rcoes@naxs.net](mailto:rcoes@naxs.net).



**Mastering disaster.** Hampton CERT members practice fire suppression. (Courtesy Photo.)

## Get disaster CERTified

By Sam Hoffman, Chief, Training & Resource Br., VDEM Operations Div.

**A** severe spring storm has hit your neighborhood, blocking many streets with fallen trees and debris tangled amidst still sparking power lines.

Suddenly, a neighbor runs from her home shouting for help. Her husband and son are trapped in a backyard workshop crushed by a large tree. You realize fire and rescue services may be a long time coming.

Fortunately, this story has a happy ending. You and several other neighbors recently completed your local Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training and know what to do until professional help arrives.

The Los Angeles City Fire Department developed the CERT concept in 1985 to train civilians to meet their immediate needs after a major disaster. Images of the Mexico City earthquake were still fresh when over 100 untrained volunteers lost their lives trying to rescue neighbors and co-workers from collapsed homes and office buildings.

Following the 1987 and 1994 California earthquakes, scores of trained citizens responded to aid their neighbors; many more were able to care for themselves and their families until help arrived. Since FEMA made it available nationally in 1993, dozens of communities in 36 states and Puerto Rico have conducted CERT training.

CERT is a key component of the Citizen Corps, promoting partnering between local government emergency services and the people they serve. The goal is for local emergency personnel to train neighborhoods, community groups, businesses and schools to take a more active (cont'd on page 4)





*Here we go again ... (1) Sen. George Allen, Gov. Mark Warner and VDEM State Coordinator Michael Cline arrive by helicopter. (2) Gov. Warner gets a firsthand account of the devastation from Kenny Hale, Buchanan County public works. (3) Dr. John Dreyzehner inoculates a flood victim. (4) VDEM Regional Coordinator Cindi Causey and Russell County Emergency Manager Judy Cooling tour a Disaster Recovery Center with Betty Bevins, Clinch Valley Independent Living Services.*

## Hurley (cont'd from page 1)

People just ran around like ants – working and trying to locate loved ones. It brought tears to my eyes to watch those people who had lost everything pull together like they did.”

For the first three days, Buchanan County response and recovery was primarily local. The state police manned roadblocks on the washed-out roads.

By midmorning Friday, they set up a command center at the Hurley Middle School where the school superintendent sheltered residents the night before.

Local emergency managers, social services and county representatives, school officials and volunteers flocked to the middle school to assist victims. The health department administered tetanus shots to more than 800 people by week's end.

Supplies poured in non-stop. The school cafeteria served hot meals, and county supervisors,

police and volunteers began food and water deliveries to stranded citizens.

The school became an oasis where residents could find food, water, showers, a pallet to sleep on and news of family and friends.

Clinch Valley Independent Living Services located homes or rooms for those who were displaced. Local social service workers took over shelter operations, and area food banks trucked in food and water.

While the waters were still ebbing Friday morning, an army of heavy equipment from TEACO Coal Company and other providers headed toward Hurley.

Several American Electric and Power Company employees, who rode out the high waters parked on a knoll near their downtown Hurley substation, restored power within 24 hours of the water receding.

By dawn Friday, the road into Hurley was so full of

rescue workers and heavy equipment that it took more than an hour to travel the few miles up and down Knox Creek.

In those early morning hours, state troopers rescued stranded residents and searched for the missing.

Their helicopter air-lifted at least 20 people cut off by high water. Many had spent the night shivering on the hillsides overlooking Knox Creek.

The National Guard pulled into town on Saturday. Within one day, they had erected a temporary bridge to link stranded citizens with emergency services. They spent the remainder of their two weeks on site clearing mountains of debris.

McMurray remains in awe of this local recovery effort.

“You could probably sit down and try to plan for something like this, but you can't *really* plan for it until it happens,” McMurray said.



“With something of this magnitude, you end up just doing what comes naturally. You just start helping people.”

**VDEM Photos by  
Suzanne Simmons (1-3)  
and Tricia Chappell (4).**

# Training Calendar

## Emergency Management

**Disaster Response & Recovery Operations** - June 4-6/Newport News

**Effective Communication**  
June 11-13/Portsmouth

**Emergency Planning Workshop**  
June 18-20/Richmond

**Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Train-the-Trainer**  
June 26/Hampton; July 10/Alexandria  
Aug. 7/Culpeper; Aug. 28/Richmond

**Basic Public Information Officer**  
July 30-Aug. 1/Portsmouth

## Radiological

**Radiological Emergency Response Training - General Session**  
June 25/North Anna

**Virginia Operations Plan Exercise**  
July 16/Richmond + jurisdictions

## Reservist Training

**Decision Making Skills**  
June 11/Richmond

**Community Relations Workgroup/  
Media Awareness** - June 19/Roanoke

## Search and Rescue

**SAR Dog Workshop**  
June 22-23/Loudoun County

**SAR Council**  
July 27/Richmond

## Technological Hazards

**Hazmat Tactical Command & Safety** - June 18-20/Lynchburg

**Hazmat Planning & Management**  
Sep. 13-15/Bristol

**Hazmat Conference**  
Sep. 26-28/Virginia Beach

**Public Safety Response to  
Terrorism (PSRT) - Tactical**  
June 5-6/Petersburg  
**PSRT - Management**  
Sep. 10-11/Petersburg

## CERT Training (continued from page 2)

role in emergency management planning and to prepare themselves and others for disasters.

This month, VDEM begins offering the CERT Train-the-Trainer course for those who will organize or coordinate local CERT programs. Topics include: program planning, funding sources, recruiting, training, supervision and team retention.

Interested individuals can view the course schedule on the VDEM Web site ([www.vaemergency.com](http://www.vaemergency.com)) and contact Curt Nellis at [cnellis@vdem.state.va.us](mailto:cnellis@vdem.state.va.us) for more information.

## VDEM donation standards detailed

By Bob Lambert  
VDEM Staff Writer

When disaster strikes, donations help fill the gap between victims' unmet needs and assistance available through federal, state and local programs.

Transferring funds is often quicker and far less costly than hauling truckloads of donated goods long distances.

Under a revised policy arising from last summer's Southwest Virginia floods, VDEM is now channeling donations through localities and organizations for direct distribution to disaster victims.

VDEM State Coordinator Michael Cline says the changes formalize guidelines to establish stricter control over the solicitation, collection and treatment of cash assistance.

The new policy establishes official procedures to handle donations, requires a receipt be sent to donors for all amounts of \$25 or more and establishes a Donated Funds Management Committee to coordinate and monitor donations activities.

"In the past, funds not designated for a specific purpose were kept in a state-level account," Cline says. "Under the new guidelines, we will return funds to the donor if we can't determine a specific designation or purpose."

"As long as we can determine the donor's intent, we will forward the funds to the local entity or through VVOAD (Virginia Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster)."

Eligible recipients of disaster relief donations include local recovery task forces, other charitable organizations and donor-designated charitable organizations.

For more information about VDEM's donated funds policy, contact Frank Williamson at [fwilliamson@vdem.state.va.us](mailto:fwilliamson@vdem.state.va.us) or (804) 897-6500, ext. 6535.



**Cashing in.** Buchanan County quickly stopped accepting clothing contributions and offered a cash donation option.



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